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# Yes, Probably

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YES, PROBABLY

A Thesis Presented

By

HANNAH ESTHER BROWN RICHARDS

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

May 2011

Department of Art, Architecture, and Art History



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A Thesis Presented

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ABSTRACT

YES, PROBABLY

MAY 2011

HANNAH ESTHER BROWN RICHARDS, B.A., SMITH COLLEGE

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This M.F.A. thesis paper and drawing installation deal with the physical relationship of the body to itself, and with the neurological wiring connecting the parts to each other and to the whole. In my drawing *10 Months/ 9 x 20 Feet*, I work on a scale several times that of my own body. Issues explored include contingency, relationships, accumulation, parameters, play, record, time, duration, proprioception, metonymy, fragmentation, space, scale, sight, process, and drawing. Over ten months, I produced a single drawing measuring twenty feet across and nine feet tall. My body's repetitive contorting in order to trace itself, in order to literally circumnavigate a moving form, can be seen as a means of familiarizing myself in a tactile sense with the physical relationship of myself to myself.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

My work deals with the physical relationship of the body to itself, and with the neurological wiring connecting the parts to each other and to the whole. In my drawing *10 Months/ 9 x 20 Feet*, I work on a scale several times that of my own body. I use arguably the most direct medium of drawing with pencil on paper to build up a density of line, obscuring the body as physical impetus. This drawing reveals a series of metaphorical relationships induced by the simultaneous accumulation and fragmentation that occurs in layering mark upon mark in the process of tracing my own body, thus obscuring it into a reductive state of abstracted linear and topographic imagery.

The accumulation of marks that result is a record of duration. The drawing maps in real time this physical movement of tracing a form. In the process of moving to trace it, my shifting body negates the prospect of a complete outline. It is necessarily only a part of an impossible whole. Thus, the drawing records time, or what we conceive of as time, rather than the body itself. The body operates a physical point of reference in the making, but is lost in scale of the drawing both in size and density.

The sense of scale shifts continuously. It fluctuates from that of the body down to the microscopic, up to the galactic, and out into to the metaphysical. Just as its breadth of scale makes the drawing arduous to see whole, its contents also require the witness to physically shift in order to see the work. Because the marks are faint, they compel a witness also to move and shift in order to find a viewing distance that can accommodate the observation of both parts and whole.

Over ten months, I produced a single drawing measuring twenty feet across and nine feet tall. Working in nine-by-nine foot sections on the floor of my studio, I will see the completed drawing for the first time as a whole as I hang it in the gallery. In its making, relational intimacy is forged while sustaining physical contact with the material for a length of time. My body's repetitive contorting in order to trace itself, in order to literally circumnavigate a moving form, can be seen as a means of familiarizing myself in a tactile sense with the physical relationship of myself to myself.



Figure 1, *10 Months/ 9 x 20 Feet*, installation view 1, 2010-11.

## CHAPTER 2

### IN THE MAKING: PROCESS AND MATERIAL

I trace my body moving as I trace it. Process is central to this work; the drawing is the act of making. I lie on the paper and use a pencil to trace the movement of my body as I work. My body, unclothed, makes contact with the paper. I record this contact, then later go back to record the contact of those lines. The act itself becomes the drawing, and a performance in its recording, but also a fragmentation, at odds with itself. Given its heavy history, I should clarify my use of the word trace (Derrida's *traceur*) as particular to its interchangeability with outline, the movement around an object, as opposed to what is left behind. In the first aspect of my drawing I use the verb actively, expressing an act; but in marking their intersections, I highlight the temporal opposition between these two meanings, action and evidence.

According to Derrida, the word *trait* encompasses a breadth of meaning that includes “feature, line, stroke, mark,” where the “French concept of *traceur* does not only mean ‘to draw’ and definitely not to trace: rather, it implies a direct creation.”<sup>1</sup> Just as Derrida makes this particular distinction, I would argue that in the process of my drawing, the act of tracing is imbued with a new vocabulary. It shifts from a record that is observed, a translation, in the sense of something that is static and fixed in time, into a direct record, a metaphorical object of tactile sight. In drawing my own movement—the outline of my body shifting with motion as I reach around to map myself—I cannot see what I am describing. So it holds a different kind of fidelity to form, one that circumvents observation, imagination and visual sight.

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<sup>1</sup> Drawing Now, i.

Sight is traditionally integral to drawing and knowledge as “an equivalent to knowing (‘I see’).”<sup>2</sup> The method I use to draw takes literally Derrida’s assertion of the drawing as ‘blind.’ But mine is a tactile kind of sight, a record that uses the hand without the intermediary of the eye, then alternately comes back to rely on the eye for certain contingencies.



Figure 2, *10 Months/ 9 x 20 Feet*, detail 1, 2010-11.

The activity of this drawing’s making is process, movement, self-generative. The action of my body’s movement combined with pencil to paper creates an image that is not a traditional narrative, cannot successfully be followed, will not provide a resolution in a clearly chronological sense. While the drawing itself could be read as a building up

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<sup>2</sup> de Zegler, *The Stage of Drawing*, 93-108

of physical history, it is not narrative in the visual sense of legible images that can be remembered as signs. Instead, it forms linear patterns generated by action, which dissipate into textural rather than singular images that are not easily recalled or pieced together. It provides space for a viewer to ruminate among the delicate line work and incipient patterning.

The viewer can enter a line, follow it for a time, but the prospect of continuing to its end seems unmanageable as it laces through the tangle of intervening lines. So the act of looking mimics the making in reverse, looking not for a form but rather, absorbing, or absorbing into, dense layering. I am drawing time, mapping space.



Figure 3, *Figure A*, 2010.

My materials are simple, non-hierarchical. Pencil is basic, immediate, subtle, versatile, and paper is ubiquitous. This dispensation with hierarchy is not arbitrary; my drawing contains several examples of anti-hierarchical practices. Its support, paper, is easily accessible and as such democratic. The process of its making, a cyclical mark that hovers over a form and a surface, my body and the paper, does not pierce its support. That the figure in my drawing is subject, object, maker and yet obscured from the image, breaks down the hierarchies involved in the model/artist relationship.

These examples and others point to feminist readings of my work, which I do not deny. But neither do I call my work feminist. Like filmmaker Paul Chan, who takes on a dual-role as artist and activist separately in order to “keep his allegiances clear,”<sup>3</sup> I do not find it useful to collapse the two. If we look at contemporary feminism as an *-ism* analogous to modernism, we can view it as—rather than a fixed *-ism* with finite brackets of definition—a series of imperative questions by means of which to make meaningful inquiry. Seen in this framework, I acknowledge the many ways in which one could read my work through feminist lenses, while holding art and feminism as distinct pursuits.

Like Roni Horn, I conceive of my work as primarily a drawing practice. In an interview with Mark Godfrey, Horn explained that despite the varied two- and three-dimensional forms of her work, “if you were to ask me what I do, I would say that I draw—this is the primary activity.”<sup>4</sup> The support can change, the materials may shift roles, but the activity is the same. Though it takes different forms, certain irreducible elements exist. The notions of figure and ground remain even when the paper moves

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<sup>3</sup> Bui, *In Conversation*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Godfrey, *Diagrams of Thought*, 1.

from ground to figure, with the wall or physical space as ground, in some of my previous installation work, just as in drawing.

In a cultural and political climate whose recent shifts directly impact, as in any time, the making of art, a new relationship with permanence has emerged. This condition yields an attraction to materials simultaneously transient and direct. The nature of works of paper is that of immediacy and flux. Emma Dexter, in her introduction to Phaidon's *Vitamin D: New Perspectives in Drawing*, describes the allure of "its inherent subjectivity, its leanings toward the popular and vernacular,"<sup>5</sup> the ideal nature of drawing as a form of expression that can resist traditional convention. As such, it occupies a position that is both of its time and necessarily outside it, straddling time, as inherently contemporary.<sup>6</sup> If we look at "eternal incompleteness"<sup>7</sup> and its obvious expression of difference as an essential feature, this can perhaps explain the re-emergence of drawing. Furthermore, "its contradiction, its immediacy and directness forces drawing to be authentic and thereby resist one of the fundamental premises of postmodernism: the continuous exchange between authenticity and its copy."<sup>8</sup>

I am drawn to working on paper for the preceding reasons as well as by the tactility of these nuanced materials. I am interested in how a large-scale drawing on paper can manage to remain, in many respects, subtle. This, in accordance with its magnitude yields a kind of unsettling quality, a slow overtaking of one's field of view. Chuck Close often describes his motivation for making drawings on a large scale as a means of making the viewer look longer, as the scale of his work required a certain

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<sup>5</sup> Dexter, *Vitamin D*, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Agamben, *Nudities*, 65.

<sup>7</sup> *Drawing Now*, xi.

<sup>8</sup> *Drawing Now*, xi.

length of time to walk from one side to the other. In that extra time of physical movement across its length, the viewer might pick up on the more subtle aspects of Close's process, such as the way in which he carefully structured the process of their making. Close uses a careful system of organization to craft his drawings such that he could eliminate variables and hone in on the task at hand. He explains in interviews with both NPR's *Radiolab*<sup>9</sup> and Phong Bui<sup>10</sup> that this method of creating a specific structure with which to approach his subject not only help him to more systematically apprehend the visual information he processed visually, but also allow him to know exactly what to work on each day as he comes to his studio practice. This development of a system, which I relate to the scientific method, eliminates variables in order to focus on a specific task at hand. I come back to this way of working time and again to narrow my focus, to make sense of a limited set of ideas.



Figure 4, Chuck Close, *Phil/Watercolor*, 1977.

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<sup>9</sup> NPR, *Radiolab*, "Stranger in the Mirror."

<sup>10</sup> Bui, *In Conversation*, 2.



## CHAPTER 3

### CONFOUNDING EXPECTATIONS: OPPOSITIONS AND CONTINGENCIES

In everything I make, I first develop a structure. These set parameters control the medium or support, as well as how and where I make each mark. In order to work, there must be a pattern followed, a finite framework within which I draw or build. Like any structure, mine is arbitrary yet essential: the rules are rigid, but always leave space for that which is utterly subjective. I trace my body as it moves and adhere with strict fidelity to this rule, but when I work I have no prescribed place to start drawing at each sitting, so that the pattern of the drawing relies on some elements of contingency.

The way I make this drawing is the way I make all of my drawings: I devise a set of rules that govern the process. In contrast to each fixed parameter, there are those that remain unfixed, contingent upon the moment, sight, and my own aesthetic. In other drawings I have used time as a parameter, but in this drawing, time is inextricable and the only the limits of its duration are prescribed. So I will not specify hours or days to work, but I will complete the drawing between August 1, 2010 and April 1, 2011. Some of the parameters have to do with Derrida's *trait*, the transformation of the trace into a kind of visual mapping. I use only a mechanical pencil with 0.3mm 3H polymer graphite to outline my body. The duration of each sitting is not prescribed, but I start in a different place every time I begin drawing, and when I get up, that sitting is complete.

I draw what I am doing as I am doing it. I make the outline of my body without clothes as it moves. This form is both fixed and unfixed. Fixed, in that I am always using my own body with no extraneous material; unfixed, in that its form inevitably shifts and

varies not only day to day but over the course of these several months. When I have finished the task of outlining, another unfixed parameter evaluated based on sight and my own aesthetics, I mark every intersection made from the lines of outlining my body, making tiny, precise dots that form a constellation of convergences. The relationship of these parameters is such that their contingencies produce a push and pull that alternately informs and obscures, yielding a teetering liminal space.

As with Sol LeWitt and Chuck Close, my rules provide a structure. The specificity of certain aspects of the making allows the other aspects to open, providing a space of freedom. Freedom, in the case of my own work, refers to the subjective, and to the space yielded when the focus on material and method is narrow enough to allow for contingent oppositions to arise. Giorgio Agamben, in *Nudities*, makes a simple but resonant distinction that has arisen in our time: the capacity to not know. It is precisely the loss of knowing what we can not do, that limits us.<sup>11</sup>

As I mentioned earlier, Chuck Close set parameters in part to bring focus to his studio practice, essentially so that he would not waste his time or energy deciding how and what to make each day. In Agamben's view, there exists no definition of that which is not possible to clarify what, then, is possible. I am interested in what I cannot do for two reasons. First, as a means of concentration, a tool I use in all aspects of my life in order to limit the overwhelming vastness of choice I encounter in my daily life and its paralyzing effect over time. Second, and related, in dealing with my inability to filter most of this information, and as a way of physically processing the interactions of my own body, I can begin to draw parallels and make sense of my own surroundings. In my

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<sup>11</sup> Agamben, *Nudities*, 44-45.

work, like that of many other artists, parameters define what I cannot do, so that I can attend to the business of doing what I can.

In *Nudities*, Agamben's focus is the instability of the moment. Action within the moment is what allows knowledge of itself, but it has always in some way already passed or not yet transpired; it is the wobble of self-consciousness. Here is what Agamben reveals: that perhaps these relationships all revolve around this movement, which he refers to in the last line as a dance. He reminds us that there is no study of ignorance as there is of knowledge, but this in fact is the next frontier. The active relationship between ignorance and knowledge is where we will find freedom. It is with this relationship in mind that I make a drawing about information perceived through non-visual means. Half of the parameters are certain, the finitude of information is also half-certain. It can be finite in its duration but not as a complete set of data because that completion does not exist. It is a sample, a part standing in for a whole, a metonymous unit.

My approach to drawing also marks a slight departure from the rule-based visual work of the sixties that includes William Anastazi, Bruce Nauman, Chuck Close, and Sol Lewitt, of whose own work this last notes, "To work with a plan that is preset is one way of avoiding subjectivity... All decisions are made beforehand, so execution becomes a perfunctory affair."<sup>12</sup> This distinction is, in part, by virtue of the time in which we live and make work. The aforementioned artists were living and working in response to a political and cultural climate that is necessarily different that the one in which I am living and working. Where media ubiquity was only beginning to take hold in the sixties, today it is taken as a matter of course. Process drawing in response to a despondency toward

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<sup>12</sup> LeWitt, *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art*.

and rejection of the figure—then radical—is now well tread. Today I take for granted that painting will never be dead (though many deaths it has suffered) and I have a range of choice in media that is not limited by or through history. In my hands, these rules now—while still ultimately used to focus—take on different meaning. Unlike LeWitt, I want my rules to make space for subjectivity. I seek to drive a wedge with the subjective, rather than accidental and “naturally forced” variables, as it intersects the set parameters. The simultaneous contradiction and analogy of the parameter and subjective become the space of my work.

My contingencies are deliberate. I am interested in setting up a system that is specific, such that it can make space within its framework for a broad set of issues, interpretations, and interactions to take place. I set rules that dictate a portion of the work, so that the confines of its execution are limited, but the balance of that coolness is tempered with the arbitrary and subjective. These contingencies cause quiet tension in the drawing, leading the viewer to attempt conclusions, but ultimately yielding only a process of looking that mimics the experience of its’ making.

Trisha Brown also uses parameters in her choreography and drawing practice. Her drawings are often records of movement. For example, in her piece *So That the Audience Does Not Know Whether I Have Stopped Dancing*, she holds charcoal and pastel in her hands and toes to mark the paper as she dances in improvised movements. These marks map her path across the paper, in contrast to other drawings in which she notes choreography for her company when words are insufficient. Though her drawings record activity, I am most interested in Brown’s process of choreographing dances using permutations and parameters, such as *Accumulation*, and in her collaboration with

Rauschenberg, *If You Couldn't See Me*. In both of these pieces, she uses an “entirely new lexicon of ordinary movement performed with effortless directness—twist of the wrist and torso, turns of the head, shifts of the weight, lifts of the leg, steps backward and forward, swings of the arm.”<sup>13</sup>



Figure 5, Trisha Brown, *Accumulation*, 1971.

Layered with words in patterned permutations, her work could be compared, in a physical and aural iteration, to the rules laid out in a Sol LeWitt drawing. As the title

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<sup>13</sup> Crimp, *You Can Still See Her*, 1.

succinctly infers, *Accumulation* uses an additive structure of simple distinct gestures, each performed and repeated, then another is performed and repeated, and so on. Slowly, they become indecipherable as they are layered and multiplied, erupting into a transfixing circumstance of motion and sound. But Brown also uses the tension of her parameters and the improvised, vernacular movements of her dances—the subjective—as foils for each other, creating tension in those oppositions. And a resolution is far from clear; Brown’s work not only elicits fascination in her “radical reinvention of dance,”<sup>14</sup> but also provokes open-ended thought.

There is no prescribed destination or conclusion to be reached in viewing my drawing. No sense of certainty can be achieved. Indeed, as I have described, the possibility of certainty is challenged by the process of making this drawing – each time around the body, the pencil cannot follow the same path (“Never the same river twice”); space, time, and scale appear to shift constantly. The action of the drawing, cyclical in its course, seems to direct the viewer to move around and around, in and out.

Danica Phelps talks about her work in terms of systems. Her work deals with relationships, is autobiographical, and is in most cases comprised of or distilled from the process of drawing. She references math (her mother’s vocation), where I cite scientific process, as the impetus for systems in the work. In both cases, we conceive a structure within which to attempt documentation of the mundane, autobiographical issues that also fit into larger cultural issues. Phelps’s work is indicative of the cultural climate in many ways, dealing with finances, fertility, sex; it is vulnerable, even exhibitionistic in its personal nature.

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<sup>14</sup>Crimp, *You Can Still See Her*, 1.



Figure 6, Danica Phelps, *IVF in India* (detail.) 2008.

I feel a strong connection to Phelps's work in part because our processes are similar; though her work departs from mine where she articulates the vulnerability of her subjects (herself and those close to her). Phelps uses similar materials to my own to convey an affect, a kind of frank honesty regarding the narrative they depict. My linework obscures the narrative form, expressing less vulnerability than Phelps. Or if it does, it is implicit rather than explicit; the marks express the quality of each movement and in a broader sense, the poignancy of striving to locate ourselves in time. Like Phelps, I depict relationships in space, negotiating proximity to the self as well as others. These issues of propinquity can be defined in concrete terms, as in much of Phelps's work. Her *Stripebooks* and IVF roll drawings depict physical and narrative information, while my marks refer to physical recording of my body's movement and the narrative of that movement.

## CHAPTER 4

### FRAGMENTATION: MATERIAL AND METAPHOR

In a physical sense, viewing my drawing mimics the method in which it is made: there is visual blindness; one cannot simultaneously see both the marks and the work in its entirety.

Unlike in a narrative drawing, that which is peripheral is forgotten. It is, in a way, hopeless for the viewer to remember previously viewed sections because there is no concrete image to recall, so one cannot piece together the parts in the mind as one would a composition of objects. Viewing the work is necessarily fragmented, like the experience of its making, and like my experience of recording the relational space of my body. To apprehend the drawing as a whole is essentially impossible. Its size precludes clear viewing from the reasonable distance usually required in order to take in a complete image of that scale. But distance fades the delicate linework, the majority of which is only legible at close range. From further distance, the drawing appears as only constellations of marks. The tenuous balance in observation requires the viewer to finely tune several viewing distances in order to find a satisfactory sense of the drawing, thereby demanding a physical interaction with the piece.

The shape of the body falls away, but the lines that remain mark paths and fissures that lead the eye around, then eventually tangle into the larger whole. This metaphor extends to the self, in that we cannot pinpoint one facet of the self as a single self in full possession of the multi-faceted personality that one person contains.





Figure 7, *10 Months/ 9 x 20 Feet*, installation view 2, 2010-11.

In *Nudities*, Agamben locates us in the present moment by means of making distinctions. He discusses the pivot point or caesura, the break between past and present as a wound to be healed but also be retained as a division.<sup>15</sup> The drawing itself contains a similar caesura; as discussed earlier, the set of information presented in it is a kind of metonymy. Just as the contemporary must be both within and somehow outside the present moment in order to reflect upon it, so must she be able to operate in the past and future histories in order to properly understand this moment's prescience. There is a simultaneous shattering and welding back together, to be of and in but not quite in it is to

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<sup>15</sup> Agamben, *Nuditites*, 12-16.

be contemporary. What is divided is not truly separate; these parts are inextricable from each other, folded into a fractured entity.



Figure 8, *10 Months/ 9 x 20 Feet*, detail 2, 2010-11.

In marking each point of contact with my pencil, I mimic this attempt at welding together. In an effort to make sense of the layered lines of tracing, I intimately traverse the drawing in order to mark every intersection. So there are two simultaneous opposing forces: the breaking of the image into these discrete fragments via the marking of these points, and the attempt to unite the layers of line and fragmentation through that same process of marking.

The similarly fragmented drawings of Roni Horn simultaneously reveal and obscure process, making it both central to the image and cryptic. Mark Godfrey describes this aspect of her work in terms of its relationship with doubt, observing

This sense of doubt about the nature of the process is part of the experience of the drawings, and all the more powerful because the annotations on them can seem to imply the existence of a compositional system that we could figure out – if only we were attentive enough. But faced with the final drawing there is no way of discovering what previous forms the composition took as it came to formation.<sup>16</sup>

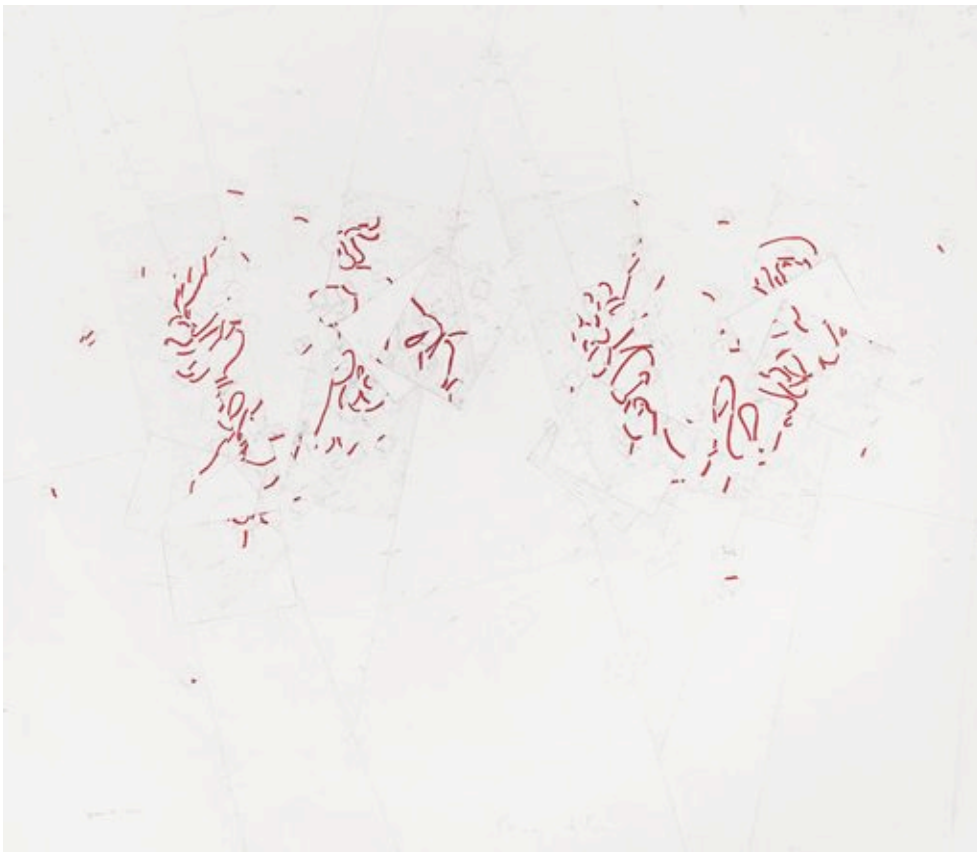


Figure 9, Roni Horn, *Were 4*, 2002. 198.1 x 214 cm.

Godfrey notes Horn's transparency about her drawing, she "unabashedly describes the procedure"<sup>17</sup> and yet the process remains opaque when faced with the

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<sup>16</sup> Godfrey, *Diagrams of Thought*, 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 2

drawings themselves. This kind of confounding is in some ways quintessential to the postmodern approach, one that provides an array of feasible solutions but nothing in the way of a single conclusion. Like Horn, I approach my work with neither entirely predetermined nor entirely intuitive processes. A balance of the subjective and systematic is mutually shared while a process of layering results in a similarly confounding experience of space.

And while the process of my drawing is not entirely obscured from the viewer, neither is it immediately clear. The repetitive action of its execution results in dense layers, such that a reference to landscape surfaces emerges more prominently than the body. That the drawing is generated through the contortion of reaching around my own body in order to pursue an outline that is impossible to complete, becomes peripheral, if not irrelevant to the early moments of looking. This aspect of the drawing is not impossible to decipher, given some tenacity of observation. The cultural condition of immediacy may exclude most observers from this last aspect of the drawing, but even at first glance the accumulation of mark as a punctuation of time is clearly evident.

The latest incarnation of *Drawing Now*,<sup>18</sup> struck me by the variety of ways in which we can conceive of drawing. Indeed, its editors confirmed it as the medium of the moment, pointing out its role in art history as both resurgent and consistent. It is the most fundamental medium of art-making but also in some ways existing outside of other kinds of art; it is oppositional in every definition of itself. Drawing eludes concrete evaluation

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<sup>18</sup> This one published by a print and online journal, TRACEY, devoted to contemporary forms of drawing, rather than the more familiar versions by MOMA.

of its place in art, culture, history, philosophy—despite its agreed-upon essential and ubiquitous nature.

The medium is inherently self-conscious as well as intuitive. Drawing's cultural trajectory seems to point to the contradiction in our comfort, indeed interest, in what is awkward. Catherine de Zegher, in her introduction to *On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century*, notes its place as a parallel mode of communication, rather than pre- or post-verbal.<sup>19</sup> Its relationship to language need not describe a visual object or experience, but instead can be a place where perception meets conception, following Derrida's metaphor of blindness, which disrupts the "assumption that drawing must transcribe observation."<sup>20</sup>

The awkwardness that de Zegher points out in particular is highlighted in the way that I make my drawing. The physical act of contorting around my own body is nothing if not awkward to do and to imagine. The process of tracing a shifting figure that is both subject and object, then marking each intersection of the lines generated by this outline is another kind of fragmentation, one that oscillates between breaking and healing, like Agamben's wound.<sup>21</sup> The contrast of these two components of the drawing alternately separate from and absorb into one another, such that one cannot tell which precedes the other. From a viewer's perspective, there is a consistently shifting sense of the drawing, in that the marked points interrupt the attempt to follow any line through its own trajectory.

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<sup>19</sup> de Zegher, *On Line*, Intro.

<sup>20</sup> TRACEY, *Drawing Now*, xi

<sup>21</sup> Agamben, *Nudities*, 16.

## CHAPTER 5

### DRAWING TIME, MAPPING SPACE: THE RECORD

I am compelled to record that which constantly shifts and is therefore difficult to map. Landscape, body, space—these, like all else, are in flux. My drawings evoke landscapes, topographical maps, geological formations, and constellations in the process of attempting to complete an outline of my own body as it moves. Each layer of this drawing, however, further obscures the form of the body, just as going over the same path yields more variability than specificity.

Mapping has all sorts of connotations. The one I find most relevant is its insistence of our impulse to record that which is inherently transient, in flux—which is to say, everything.

Deleuze and Guattari clarify their particular meanings of the words *trace* and *map* in the first chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*. In describing the rhizome, they make a clear distinction: “The rhizome is altogether different [from the trace], *a map and not a tracing.*”<sup>22</sup> They differentiate the two by characterizing the map as “open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification.”<sup>22</sup> I use the word *map* in talking about my process because it refers to an activity of motion, movement, flux: that which is kinetic. Space for shifting and changing is implied in this term, as in the drawing, where the path of these subtle variations is made into a layered record through the action of my repetitive outline.

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<sup>22</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 12.

The definition of *trace* intersects with my earlier discussion of Derrida's *trait* and *traceur* in Chapter 1, where these two terms signify a mark that is an authentic creation, a meaning that is not present in Deleuze and Guattari's use of the word; their use of *map* most closely relates to Derrida's *traceur*. In these terms, this form of drawing departs from the mimetic action of tracing a pre-existing image, into a kind of moment-by-moment exercise in transience, in what Deleuze and Guattari define as authentic creation through the term *mapping*. It is the iteration of what all material objects and beings necessarily practice in each moment: the nature of changing-ness, consistently engaging the viewer and maker in a discourse about that what is never fixed in time.

In *Francis Bacon: the Logic of Sensation*, Deleuze describes the experience of time as unfixed, un-recordable, as that "which is non-sonorous and invisible – how can time be painted, how can time be heard?"<sup>23</sup> These cannot be depicted in any traditional sense, but the attempt to record the perception of motion and duration that we call time becomes a poignant exploration of that which is both without and within.

New research in neuroscience suggests that any kind of subtle trauma can cause parts of the brain to shut down, requiring it to rely on only the primary functions of our most "primitive" brain. The right hemisphere remains intact but becomes inaccessible. Though functioning will appear normal, the relationship templates that are inherent to humans fail, so that emotions associated with the right hemisphere like lust, rage, care, panic and play are switched off as a protective mechanism. Jann Panksepp, in *Affective Neuroscience*, shows evidence that this kind of behavior is common to mild autism-

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<sup>23</sup> Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 40

spectrum disorders as well as otherwise high-functioning individuals who have experienced any kind of psychological trauma resulting from a variety of sources.<sup>24</sup>

Much of this information is remarkably similar to Henri Bergson's 1946 theory of memory and time, where trauma affects the neurobiology of moving thoughts and images from short term into long term memory. Bergson postulates in his book *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics* that the traumatic memory loops in short term memory, perpetually reappearing in dreams and thoughts while being prevented from permanent filing into long-term memory. This looping of traumatic memory can impact the experience of time, where the experience of time is singular to individual.<sup>25</sup> Bergson intuited through observation what neuroscientists like Panksepp later discovered through physical research of the brain.

As a child, my sister-in-law Grace made an observation that aptly characterizes our experience of technology and media saturation and its effect on our perception of record-making. From her toddler car seat, she remarked to her family, "If I recorded my life [in real time,] I would spend the rest of my life watching it." Evoking Bergson's unraveling spool and thread rolling into a ball, Grace aptly described Bergson's concept of Duration.

The line in my drawing can be seen as this thread, and its paths across the drawing as the unraveling and rolling of it. Marking my movements in real time, the tracing of my body becomes like Bergson's looping of traumatic memory, going over and over itself until it can find a way into long-term memory. The mapping of this

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<sup>24</sup> Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience*, 47.

<sup>25</sup> Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, 164-165.



progressive movement, accumulating marks that shift with the repetitive action that shifts with each cycle around the body, hovers around some kind of resolution that may not materialize. In my experience, the input of my senses rarely matches the information processed. If sense cannot be made of it, the looping continues. And continue it would, in this drawing. Like Grace's analogy, were I to continue this drawing indefinitely, there would be no "natural" endpoint, only a folding into itself. Thus, the parameters I have set in making the drawing are important because resolution is irrelevant.

My work marks time and duration via accumulation—amassing glue, pins, gouache, or simple pencil lines and marks—like little flags measuring depth, space, time, coming in and out of focus in relation to the paper or the wall, which both act as a ground. These layers evoke a scale shift, like sediments compressed into a rock face, which then fissures over time; or like tectonic plates shifting, never still. We can extend this analogy to the mapping of the body, which shifts like the tectonic plates, and whose outline is like both the layers of sediment and the fissures. Like land, it is never static in time.

## CHAPTER 6

### PROPRIOCEPTION AND SPACE: PARTS TO THE WHOLE

Proprioception is the sense of the relative position of neighboring parts of the body, dealing with proximity and physical relationships. Even with our eyes closed, most people have a sense of body position—where our arms and legs are, for example, and that we are moving them. Muscles, tendons, joints and the inner ear contain proprioceptors, which relay positional information to our brains. Our brains then analyze this information and provide us with a sense of body orientation and movement. This describes an ideally functioning system, imperative in integration, yet for some not always fully operational.

The human vestibular system is a group of proprioceptors. It is one of the first sensory organs developed in utero and it provides us with information to detect and process or sense of movement, the pull of gravity and position in space. Our proprioceptors tell us our relationship to our self, the various parts of the self, as well as our relationship to what is around us: other bodies and space.

In this physical communication between parts and the whole, subtlety is everything. Those with sensory integration disorder, in which proprioceptors do not properly communicate, are generally both hyper- and hypo-sensitive in certain of the senses, sometimes both in a single sense. It is a kind of homunculus of the nervous system, where there is no volume control. I have tactile and auditory sensory integration disorder, both hyper- and hyposensitive in both senses, a condition to which I briefly

alluded at the end of the previous chapter. This means a soft touch can feel abrasive, and forceful touch might be necessary to feel anything at all, or at least to quell the sensory overload elicited by softer touch. Likewise, very quiet noises can sound cacophonous and overwhelming, while I might not hear you shouting my name only inches away. All of this is to say that while a 0.03mm 3H mechanical pencil line may seem perfectly uniform to you, when I look at it, I see a breadth of variation incurred by jerky movements versus slow ones where the line weight shifts ever so slightly, and it looks like abundant variation to me.

For me, subtlety is everything, precisely because it is not subtle. Structure is essential for my day-to-day, in particular my studio practice, because extraneous stimuli are everywhere, threatening to upset my precarious equilibrium. As mentioned earlier, Chuck Close sets parameters in order to focus his practice and to make visual sense of his surroundings. Where he chooses portraiture in particular in response to his own experience of the neurological disorder of face blindness, I focus on the relationship of the body to itself because my own sense of my body in space often eludes me. Oliver Sacks, the prominent neuroscientist, also deals with the conditions of face blindness, as well as location blindness. It is his own experience that lead to his many studies on these and other neurological disorders.<sup>26</sup> These conditions provide an analogue to sensory integration inasmuch as the communication from the senses to the brain is in some way precluding that brain from recognizing basic stimuli.

The inescapable fact of fallibility is essential to my approach; the impossibility of complete knowledge or accurate representation is vital to how I work. It is human nature

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<sup>26</sup> Sacks, *Face-Blind*, 2.

to crave predictability and order. My work is concerned with the interactions between chaos and the appearance of order. In particular, I hone in on where we begin to make sense of things, how much (or how little) structure it requires to begin to make sense of a relationship: physical, emotional, or visual. The body has a mechanism for recognizing and organizing stimuli, and without this system of proprioception, one can make sense of neither the self nor the surroundings. Proprioception is how the body knows itself, and how it makes itself known; space is the location in which this occurs.

Space, both physical and figurative, seems imperative to the act of playing, and proprioception is integral to play. So playing requires a degree of vestibular organization with the self and in space. We can think of play, of thought or action, as marked by openness, experimental attitudes that require a sort of perceptive dexterity, mental and physical proprioception, a sense of proximate relationships. In his book *Homo Ludens*, Dutch historian and cultural theorist Johan Huizinga states that play is central to culture. Moyra Davey, in her essay, *Play*, notes that we can look at play as a key component of art-making: “The need to make, as to play, is a primal impulse in the same way a child quickly becomes impatient with any barrier from comfort or pleasure, particularly in the form of literal playing.”<sup>27</sup>

Huizinga’s definition of play involves its explicit pre-existence to human culture; he observes that animals have needed no instructions to play. His theory of play includes three specific components; that play is separate from ordinary or real life; that it is distinct in both locality and duration; and that it is a state of being free, in fact, freedom

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<sup>27</sup> Davey, *Play*, 2.

itself.<sup>28</sup> We can look at his definition as a state of being that is different from the everyday, and yet inherent. He describes it as a key component of art-making and of embodying the childlike state of curiosity. He also associates it with the experience of “serious strife, namely in relation to erotic pleasure.”<sup>29</sup> So here, he connects it with Lacan’s theory of the pleasure that is tied up in pain, the state of *jouissance*.

This theory of play correlates the urgency and immediacy that come with the focused state of play. When we look at the process of making in the arts, there is often a strong drive associated with these acts. These ideas support my practice of metonymy of scientific processes and ideas to provide a framework and inspiration, because “a writer, he maintains, must sometimes be a ‘raider’ in fields insufficiently explored or studied, the desire to write overtaking the exigencies or learning.”<sup>30</sup> (Again, we can interpret writing as any kind of making.) The process of responding to what superficial discoveries have been made is enough to fuel the work: “To fill in the gaps in my knowledge beforehand was out of the question. I had to write now, and I wanted to write.”<sup>31</sup> We can insert any practice in the arts into the slot of “write” here, much in the same way cultural anthropologist and art historian Ellen Dissanayake posits that art-making is not only central to culture but even biological and evolutionarily advantageous.

In a culture of immediacy where we read thousands of images daily as a matter of course, the act of curiosity, of authentic engagement, of play, requires a departure from the sweep of the surf of immediacy, demands a surfeit of time and space. William Kentridge, in an interview with Art21, cites the importance of play in the process of art-

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<sup>28</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 7-8.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>30</sup> Davey, *Play*, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, *ixi*.

making. Play has no destination.<sup>32</sup> This is of particular significance to my work because it requires that the act itself be an end in and of itself. I look to elucidate, to clarify, to explore in my work, but not to determine. I use the visual language of determinate processes such as map-making and tracing, but it is precisely with these uses that I hope to highlight the contingent nature of the content.

This state of play underscores the way I make this drawing as well as how I conceive of my work, taking on both analogous and supportive relationships. The space of play as outlined here is essentially a structure of rule (however vague) such that one can attend to the doing. Although no instructions are needed, structure does take form. Even playing alone, a child conceives of a loose structure to guide a game, and particularly when play involves others, these must be agreed-upon either explicitly or implicitly. As we have seen, the psychological space even more than the physical space must be carved out for this to occur, just as an artist comes to the studio to work but also shifts into the frame of mind needed in that studio. The analogy I draw between play and my drawing is this reliance on parameters as well as the broader framework in which I work.

I refer to the concept of play in relationship to my work also as a kind of interplay: that which is communicative. The communication of the senses involves a spatial relationship, one that evokes the analogy of Agamben's definition of contemporary. This position requires one to be both in and necessarily outside, a state of un-belonging, in some way related to, but separate from, the moment.<sup>33</sup> In this definition,

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<sup>32</sup> ART21, Drawing, 2010.

<sup>33</sup> Agamben, *Nudities*, 47.

that which is continuously at odds with itself, (e.g., sensory integration, duration, play, the body, the possibility of any absolute) and its inherent contingency, is at the root of my enquiry.



Figure 10, *10 Months/ 9 x 20 Feet*, detail 3, 2010-11.

## CHAPTER 7

### SUMMATION AND CONCLUSION

In her essay *Some Kinds of Duration*,<sup>34</sup> Pamela Lee unpacks a statement by Richard Serra: “There is no way to make a drawing—there is only drawing.”<sup>35</sup> This sentence succinctly collapses the means and the ends into a single notion of making, “as if the ways of to make a drawing—the conventional routes followed by artist and academian alike—are outstripped by the sheer fact of the gesture itself.”<sup>36</sup> Ultimately, my work makes the same assertion that the act can stand alone.

The repetitive action of both the initial trace and the subsequent markings in my drawing might amount to a mass of tangled line, incomprehensible to a viewer. Or it might result in a rich matrix of linework resulting in a depth of space that another viewer enters with both familiarity and fascination. In its viewing as well as in its making, this much is clear: like the contradictory motion of spiral learning where ignorance and insight arise simultaneously and the awareness of each is as important as its content, this drawing makes evident those emergences.

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<sup>34</sup> Lee, Pamela, “Some Kinds of Duration,” *Afterimage*, 25.

<sup>35</sup> Serra and Borden, *Richard Serra: Writings, Interviews*, 51.

<sup>36</sup> Lee, Pamela, “Some Kinds of Duration,” *Afterimage*, 25



## TECHNICAL INFORMATION

The drawing is nine feet tall and twenty feet wide and entitled *10 months/ 9 x 20 feet*. It is made exclusively with a 0.3mm point Alvin Draftline Mechanical Pencil, using 3H graphite on Savage Widetone Seamless White background paper, and installed with metal binder clips. *Figure A* is a four-by-seven-inch printed digital photograph.



Figure 11, *10 Months/ 9 x 20 Feet*, installation view 3, 2010-11.

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PHOTO OF THE ARTIST AT WORK



## IMAGE IDENTIFICATION

1. *10 Months/ 9 x 20 Feet*, installation view 1, 2010-11
2. *10 Months/ 9 x 20 Feet*, installation view 2, 2010-1
3. *Months/ 9 x 20 Feet*, detail 1, 2010-11
4. *10 Months/ 9 x 20 Feet*, detail 2, 2010-11
5. *10 Months/ 9 x 20 Feet*, detail 3, 2010-11
6. *10 Months/ 9 x 20 Feet*, detail 4, 2010-11
7. *10 Months/ 9 x 20 Feet*, detail 5, 2010-11
8. *10 Months/ 9 x 20 Feet*, detail 6, 2010-11
9. *10 Months/ 9 x 20 Feet*, detail 7, 2010-11
10. *Figure A*, 2010